The Literary Season of Venom and Muddle in America

Chronicles of Culture

Volume 1, Number 2, November 1977.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

4 Comment — Leopold Tyrmand

Opinions & Views

6 The Preaching Profiteer
—John Kenneth Galbraith: *The Age of Uncertainty* — Stephen R. Maloney

8 Those Genial Murderers
—*John Cheever: Falconer* — Dain A. Trafton

10 Three Maidens Soiled by an Epoch
—Sara Davidson: *Loose Change: Three Women of the Sixties* — Mary Ellen Fox

12 A Cautionary Tale for Adults
—Walker Percy: *Lancelot* — John Glass, Jr.

14 The Thriving Virulence and Well-Heeled Deviation
—Gore Vidal: *Matters of Fact and of Fiction: Essays 1973-1976* — Otto J. Scott

16 A Sad and Maladroit Fiesta
—Morris Dickstein: *The Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* — Christopher Manion

Commendables

18 An Arsenal Stockpiled with Arguments
—Paul Johnson: *Enemies of Society* — Robert Nisbet

Berger's Good Sense: *Facing Up To Modernity*
Trilling's Appeal: *We Must March My Darlings: A Critical Decade*

19 Burditt's Happy Ending: *The Cracker Factory*
White's Serene Talents: *Essays of E.B. White*
Caputo's Probity: *A Rumor Of War*
Eidelberg's Keen Insight: *Beyond Détente*

In Focus

20 Le Carré's Routine: *The Honourable Schoolboy*
Roth's Astute Narcissism: *The Professor of Desire*

Waste of Money

21 Coover's Contumely: *The Public Burning*
Rossner's Jaded Freakishness: *Attachments*
Ringer's and Korda's Snake Oil Peddling:
Looking Out For No. 1; Success!

22 Mitford's British-Upper-Class-Twit Ego: *A Fine Old Conflict*

In Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1977 of
Chronicles of Culture:
The Feminine Novel
of the Seventies

Tyrmand: Comment; Trafton: "The Liberation of a Free Woman" (du Plessix Gray: *Lovers and Tyrants*); Scott: "The Piety of an Empty Heart" (Didion: *A Book of Common Prayer*); Glass: "Fish Story" (Gould: *A Sea-Change*); Fox: "An Epitome of Junk" (Greene: *Blue Skies, No Candy*); *About the Chronicles of Culture;* About the Rockford College Institute.

For a $15 annual fee, the Rockford College Institute is offering a new "Publications Membership." All members will receive the three Institute publications; *The Rockford Papers, Chronicles of Culture* and a newsletter to be introduced this fall. All non-periodical publications will be included in the annual fee.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chronicles of Culture
Volume 1, Number 2, November 1977.

The Literary Season of Venom and Muddle in America

Of all the cants which are canted in this canting world—
though the cant of hypocrites may be the worst—
the cant of criticism is the most tormenting. Laurence Sterne

Chronicles of Culture is published bi-monthly by the Rockford College Institute, 5050 East State Street, Rockford, Illinois, 61101; Director: John Howard; Editor: Leopold Tyrmand; Publishing Manager: Richard A. Vaughan; Editorial Assistant: Nancy Mohrbacher; Printed by Wilson-Hall Co.; Vignette: original drawing by Warren Chappell.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—Comment—

The preceding page carries a vignette by Warren Chappell, the illustrious American artist, letterer, calligrapher and type designer. It is a pictorial comment on Laurence Sterne's opinion of critics (*Tristram Shandy,* Book III, Chap. 12). We can safely assume that the corruption of the critic, which Sterne called cant, has deepened since his days. No changes in human nature have caused this decline, rather it was the transformation of the cultural role of a critic which gave him new possibilities for influencing and manipulating larger areas of social reality. In Sterne's epoch, a critic tormented only the writers. In ours, he torments everybody. To be sure, he does it not by the mere force of his personality—there are not critics in our day of a stature to sway the fate of literature as once Boileau or Sainte Beuve did. The difference is that the modern critic is the beneficiary of a concentration of cultural powers brought about by our civilizational and social organization and by technological advance.

Modern culture is energetic. It is shaped by methodology, research and the dynamics of huge cultural systems—not by the contemplation or speculative inquiry of individuals. Saint Augustine, Erasmus and Voltaire owed their great influence to nothing but their own powers. However, during the 19th century it became clear that ideas, artistic intuition and intellectual endeavor could no longer achieve prominence on their own merits; no creative impetus could subsist alone; neither the Muses nor predestination were enough to produce a genius, a creator, or a prophet; no achievement in philosophy, literature or science could henceforth be given high visibility and flourish in culture other than through comment, interpretation and publicity—that is without the help of a critic and a journalist. To be sure, even the medieval Church anticipated these solutions: it built a successful public relations system by employing exegetes and apologists.

In our time, the critic in conjunction with the journalist have created a new alchemy: they are able to turn nothing into something by sleight of hand. They have become inquisitors, judges and policemen of mass sensitivity. The literary magazines through which the critic operates may seem to carry little weight in a commercialized society, but this is an illusion: they are the shapers of mass-consciousness. The journalist takes on their verdicts, simplifies them, and with the help of newspaper copy, camera and microphone diffuses them, in runted versions to every corner of our consciousness.

Stendhal's lot is a notable example of the omnipotence of the critic-journalist partnership: in his time, he was scorned by critics and ignored by journalists; he died in bitterness and loneliness; a century later, French critics had a change of heart; today, he is justly acknowledged as a genius. In our century we see the phenomenon of cultural majesties entirely created by literary periodicals. In high-brow parlance such creations and their authorities are attributed to the gap between two cultures—the mass, or popular, culture and the elitist one. What counts, however, is the obvious circumstance that although not many have read Proust, Kafka, Eliot, Pound, Einstein, Freud and Bertrand Russell—everybody seems to know about them as a result of the efforts of the Critic & Journalist combine. The critics and interpreters chose them as "the greats" and the reporters fashioned them into universal icons—most often understanding nothing of their wisdom.

This complex, but not too subtle, mechanism has currently fallen into the hands of an Establishment in America. It calls itself a Liberal Establishment and it is dedicated to an unrestricted freedom of expression. Under one condition: inasmuch as everything can be expressed, only what the Establishment designates as worthwhile will be commented on by the critic and widely circulated by the journalist. They themselves are members of the Establishment and see to it that no harm is inflicted upon its edifices and its ideas. And here is where the cant comes in, and Laurence Sterne appears to us our contemporary.

* * *

This Establishment is not based on political or financial power. It is not a creation of the whimsicality of social elites. It is far from being crude and vulgar, from rewarding only those who slavishly follow its line and predilections. Walker Percy, whose novel *Lancelot* we review in this issue, shares neither tenets nor penchants with the Liberal Establishment: he nevertheless was widely reviewed and fairly praised in the Establishment's media. But he did not get the kind of support that Jessica Mitford, another author mentioned in these pages, received for her memoirs. In them, she describes her membership in the Communist Party as a sort of accident caused by her intellectual myopia, but at the same time as a precious manifestation of moral rectitude, and as a great option for the liberal conscience. Percy is a Catholic who sees in his faith an instrument for a difficult salvation. Mitford is a former communist and unreformed radical (for quite silly and petty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reasons, nota bene) and this political preference gives her the full support of the Liberal Establishment of publishers, editors, critics and journalists, who have nothing but polite patience for Catholicism and its complex philosophical tradition, but a warm sentimentality for communism, especially if it has won one's conscience—the very essence of liberal morality.

Which brings us to the conclusion that, all magnanimity notwithstanding, the Establishment virtually controls the literary life in America. Some would call it oppression. That does not preclude caprice. The Establishment is powerful enough to give space in its periodicals for reviewing Paul Johnson, whom it heartily dislikes. But, it will reduce Diana Trilling's voice to the minimum because she admonishes the Establishment's critics:

> *"It is the critic who is supposed to warn us not to be seduced by art and who is delegated to ask questions about the worth of the codes which are being offered us. It is always a first task of the critic to make the implicit explicit. His is always—or so, at any rate, I believe it to be—a moralizing function, whatever additional critical purpose he may also be pursuing. And it is today, when he gives sign of being most eager to forget this responsibility, that we have most need to recall him to it . . ."*

And it will suppress news about Peter Berger who, in his book, tries to save common sense by restoring its bonds with the authorities of religion, tradition, social responsibility and moral commitment. The Establishment has little sympathy for this kind of appeal.

* * *

We have titled this issue "The Literary Season of Muddle and Venom in America." We certainly do not believe that a neat uniformity of views and tone make for a good cultural scene. We stand for multiplicity of art and intellectual expression, for pluralism of literary voices. But it looks as if the last year was exceptionally marred by virulent incoherence. The Liberal Establishment currently enshrines a gamut of ideas which have been compromised by the history of the past decade. Nonetheless, the two books on the Sixties we survey here, in spite of the thoroughness of their scrutiny, unabashedly foster a legend. Some would say it matters little: nothing of undisputed value remains from the Sixties; the subcultural movement that was called *counterculture,* and seemed to fascinate the Establishment's critics and journalists, left nothing permanent except a hairdo. No novel, no play, no movie with distinctly idiosyncratic features, substance or message, will be remembered, while the music of the era, in my opinion, will distinguish itself only through "We Shall Overcome." Dr. Fox aptly points out in her review of *Loose Change* that as of now we have virtually no literary account of the majority of the Sixties' youth, the ones who were *not* hippie, drug addict, runaway, drifter, dropout, groupie, sex hobo—because the novels, essays, plays, treatises and songs were written only about the ones who were. Which means that only a small segment of the social stratum got any hearing from the Liberal Establishment that controls the culture. We have been given a falsified image.

Is there any chance that the Establishment will change its stance and restore some balance? Not to my mind. The ruling Establishment believes in liberal ideas: that freedom should not be tainted by concerns about moral conduct; that no deliverance can be found in a sense of order, or in traditional philosophies; that permission unsubstantiated by reason is progressive while restriction backed by reason is not; that even aimless change is superior to a thoughtfully-preserved status quo. The Establishment is powerful enough to uphold imageries which are mendacious, and patterns of thinking and feeling which have become discredited. A liberal hypocrisy permeates Davidson's and Dickstein's texts: they depict emptiness and failure without acknowledging that central reality, which smacks of literary swindle. Davidson's heroines, the groupies of *Zeitgeist,* seem never to have made a decision in any way concerned with human dignity: they just react to signs of a lifestyle. However, they are considered worthy of description and critical insight, whereas that enormous majority of youth who *did not* rebel, fornicate, take drugs and challenge the war are not accorded much introspective treatment. They were, perhaps, judged too colorless for fiction and too boring for socio-psychological tracts. And if, by chance, some heedless writer was tempted by their stories, she or he wouldn't be reviewed. Or would be persecuted, as Joyce Burditt was, whose misfortune is reported in our *Commendables* section.

* * *

Anyone who, unobscured by prejudice, considers the cultural scene, must acknowledge that a variety of ideas is necessary to make American culture once again a home for everybody. As it stands now—ideas do not have equal opportunities in America. There are ideas which are welcome in the pages of the nation's most prestigious publications and on the airwaves, and other ideas which are excluded from them. The *Chronicles of Culture* is a modest attempt to challenge the almighty Establishment which preaches democracy and justice, but exploits its cultural sovereignty by ostracizing opposing views.

—*Leopold Tyrmand*

- If you are not yet a member or supporter of the Rockford College Institute, and would like to become one;
- If you would like to learn more about it;

please contact:

The Rockford College Institute
Rockford College
Rockford, Illinois 61101
Telephone: 815/226-4016

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Preaching Profiteer

John Kenneth Galbraith: *The Age of Uncertainty;*

Houghton Mifflin Company; Boston, 1977.

by Stephen R. Maloney

Reading John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Age of Uncertainty* reminds us of the famous dialogue between Hemingway and Fitzgerald. "The rich are different from you and me," said Fitzgerald. "Yes," said Hemingway, "they have more money." Galbraith agrees that the rich have more money—and he resents it. His hatred, however, makes neither a scientific nor moral argument.

The Age of Uncertainty is a monument to the mischief wrought by academic scribblers and dismal scientists—the economists. The book demonstrates that Whig historicism is still alive, if gasping a trifle emphysematically, peddling its questionable doctrine of intellectual progress. All of economic history, one is led to believe labored mightily, from the quaint doctrines of Adam Smith and David Ricardo through the sophisticated analyses of Irving Fisher and John Keynes to bring forth . . . Galbraith. A depressing thought.

Professor George Stigler has written a marvelous review of "John Kenneth Galbraith's Marathon Television Series"[1] (in reference to the BBC series that occasioned this volume). Stigler demonstrates that Galbraith has little economics and less cultural history, and I don't see any reason to replicate Stigler's criticisms.

However, there is value in considering *The Age of Uncertainty* (it's the age, not Galbraith, that is uncertain) as spiritual autobiography. Considering the book in this way allows us to touch on matters of import especially the increasing dominance of the "academic-political-bureaucratic complex" at the expense of the private sector.

The average man probably thinks of Galbraith as a writer of books, a teacher at Harvard and an occasional straight man for TV talk show hosts. However, Galbraith's whole career can be seen as an attempt to evade academic and intellectual responsibility. He has been a speech-writer for Eugene McCarthy, an ambassador to India under Johnson, an advisor to Kennedy. He has testified, by his own recollection, for a total of 120 days before Congress. And now he is a television star.

He is most at home, though, as a controller of other people's lives. The key event in his life he describes this way: "In the spring of 1941 I was put in charge of price control, one of the most powerful economic positions of the wartime years. To say I was overjoyed would be a gross understatement. In a few weeks we outgrew the Blaine House (the abode of Washington price controllers) . . . Three times during the war we burst at the housing seams and had to move . . . With minor exceptions we eventually had control of all the prices in the United States . . . If anyone left our offices with a smile, we felt we had not done our job. To be effective, price control had to be painful."

Critics for publications such as the *Nation* delight in telling us about Galbraith's wonderful sense of irony. It is irony used as anesthetic: Galbraith's too intelligent not to know that the bureaucratic ethos equals knavery. But does he—does any price-fixing bureaucrat—see the irony between his regulatory profligacy (and booming, unregulated costs) and his implacable will to deny mere mortal businessmen such growth, such increasing expenditures?

What Galbraith is attempting in his life and art is to redefine the notion of status in America — and the world. Politics, a pinch of academic training, a gracious helping of country life—in such things Galbraith grounds his theory of value. The shimmering political capitals of the world, Washington and Delhi, he contrasts to the blackened industrial cities, Birmingham and Pittsburgh. Against the vulgar Moorish revival mansions of the plutocrats he sets the townhouse in Georgetown, the cottage in Vermont, the vacation retreat in Gstadd, Switzerland. Against the voluptuous Cadillac convertibles of Texas boors, he sings the merits of the "people car" spawned by Hitler, but reclaimed by his beloved Berkeley and Cambridge. He preaches a lifestyle of egalitarianism for profit.

Few people have noted the reactionary nature of modern academic liberalism. Galbraith despises those unspeakable businessmen — those Rockefellers, Carnegies, Mellons and Vanderbilts, "all of whom made their money by producing

[1] *National Review,* May 27, 1977, pp. 601-604.

Dr. Maloney taught English poetry at the Universities of Rochester and Georgia and now chooses to work for the Phillips Petroleum Company.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cheap, suppressing competition and selling dear." We hear echoes, sounds from the distant past, from the time of the increasingly hard-up landed aristocracy. What Galbraith despises about the modern businessman is that he is *in trade.* On the other hand, we have the academic-politician-bureaucrat, a man like Galbraith. "The modern politician now ranks well above the man of wealth as a person of distinction," a classic Galbraith dictum supposed to set up a new snobbery standard.

Galbraith, the erstwhile poor farm boy from Canada, likes to assume the pose of the outsider when he scourges the bourgeoisie. Who can doubt he is speaking of himself when he says, "As often as not, the intelligent man is not sought out. Rather, he is excluded as a threat." Can it be that at his back he always hears the braying interrogation: "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?"

But Galbraith recognizes the saleability in our time of the idea of *equality,* even as he proclaims—and seeks to ensure—his superiority. Some—the academic-political-bureaucrats—will be more equal than others. When Galbraith grows up, he wants to set prices—he'll settle for being the man who controls births as second choice. For: "there is no way of combining high employment with stable prices that does not involve some control of incomes and prices."

Galbraith recognizes the key truth: the man who controls prices takes not a back seat to the President of General Motors. Those he speaks for are onto a good thing, enjoying the fruits of an irresponsible materialism while they regularly excoriate the sheer vulgar fatness of business-generated wealth. In his vision of the world, one can and should preach equality and become an elitist millionaire from preaching.

The result is chronicled by the liberal *New Republic,* now undergoing an extended repentance. "We here in Washington are independent . . . of the ebb and flow of the private economy, including . . . unemployment and inflation. Indeed the visions of generations of liberals have created a prosperous city whose population is completely isolated from the problems they're supposed to solve. They are a new privileged class—of high salaries and guaranteed security rather than wealth or birth."

Speaking of the Russian colonialism in post-World War II Poland, Galbraith says, "To be governed by one's inferiors . . . is an especially bitter thing." Like Scarlett O'Hara, Galbraith has vowed never to be poor again. If the Age of Uncertainty leaves "men wondering how and by whom and to what end they are ruled," Galbraith provides the answer. By men like him. ■

The Establishment's Darling

"Galbraith, as ever, is forthright and funny; he is a wizard at packing immense amounts of information into a style so entertaining that the reader does not realize he is being taught . . ." —*The New Yorker.*

". . . this work of Professor Galbraith's is a glorious lark—a funny, hard-hitting caper by one of the great stylists, and one of the great social consciences, of our time . . ." —*Saturday Review.*

"The combination of wit and seriousness makes him a distinguished popularizer and advocate who can waltz through wars, revolutions, famines, depressions and global follies without ever losing the crease of his Savile Row prose . . ." —*Time.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Those Genial Murderers

by Dain A. Trafton

John Cheever: *Falconer:*
Alfred A. Knopf; New York, 1977.

One of the charms of John Cheever's early work lies in the humane breadth of its sympathies. In a novel like *The Wapshot Chronicle,* or a story like "A Vision of the World," Cheever communicates a good-humored affection for the human comedy that lifts his writing above the narrow passions and animosities of so much fiction in the twentieth century. Cheever's is a minor talent, but at his best he reflects something of the great English comic tradition stretching from Chaucer to Shakespeare to Fielding to Thackeray and Trollope. Cheever's latest novel, *Falconer,* however, reveals that his good humor and humane sympathy have metamorphosed of late into something much less attractive. Affection was tempered by intelligent judgment in Cheever's early work, as in the work of Fielding or Trollope. *Falconer* evades judgment; it asks us to respond to its characters not with true sympathy but with an embrace of mindless acceptance. The novel expresses the revulsion against applying firm moral and intellectual standards that is one of the most dangerous characteristics of our time.

To use a term of which Cheever seems fond, *Falconer* can be described as unmistakably "post-Freudian." Zeke Farragut, scion of an old Yankee family that has run down to poverty and craziness, loves and hates his father: Farragut knows that his father sought to have him done away with by an abortionist. Because of this and other Oedipal wounds, as well as exposure to civilization and certain of its discontents (he has had a bad time in "a war," found the bonds of marriage a bit too tight, learned that his wife is a Lesbian, and seen through the pretenses of the professors at the university where he teaches), Farragut becomes a heroin addict. Revenge on his father and the world comes when he attacks his brother Eben, who represents the traditions of family and society: during a family quarrel Farragut strikes Eben with a fire iron; Eben falls against the fireplace and dies. Whether Eben's death results directly from Farragut's blow or from hitting the fireplace remains unclear. Nevertheless Farragut's complicity, at least in some degree, cannot be denied. Convicted of murder, he ends up in Falconer Prison, where he speedily frees himself from the past: he gets rid of his drug habit, turns to homosexuality, and broadens himself by living among the downtrodden in a brutal prison rather than among blue bloods and intellectuals on Cape Cod and in Venice. Finally, after having rather perfunctorily reviewed in memory his act of violence against his brother, Farragut deems himself worthy to escape. He conceals himself in the sack meant for the corpse of a friend, and is carried out. From this womb/tomb, he emerges, symbolically cutting himself free, a new man. The book ends on a note of hope.

As one makes one's way into *Falconer,* one's first impression is that even these lurid happenings and worn-out Freudian patterns have been endowed with a kind of charm by Cheever's power of sympathy and good humor. What might have been an overheated, tendentious tract—an indictment of war, a celebration of drugs, an exposé of prison brutality, a gay liberation manifesto—is remarkably devoid of animosity. A detached, essentially comic, tone prevails throughout. The charm of this tone, however, hides something rotten; it provides a seductive wrapping for a fruit that has gone bad. *Falconer* deals with some instances of real evil, with stupidity, cruelty, and violence that has serious, even tragic, consequences, but the novel's detached tone effectively softens our judgment, encourages us to view with tolerance what we should condemn. Thus, the heartless egoism and perversity of Farragut's wife is presented unemotionally as just another aspect of human behavior; she is not to be blamed. Similarly, prison guards can be sadistic, sometimes terrifyingly so, but we are not to think of them as bad fellows.

Dr. Trafton, currently immersed in the Italian Renaissance, views contemporary cant with benevolence.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nothing in the book, in fact, invites a strong judgment, for *Falconer's* tone does not reflect the humane intelligence of the great English tradition, but rather derives from a fundamental antagonism to all judgments about good and evil. Cheever is not telling us that we must love men in spite of their sins; his message is that we must not condemn them because there is not real guilt. In the "post-Freudian" world of *Falconer,* good and evil, sin and guilt, have disappeared. Only neuroses and "hang-ups" remain, and the aim of life is simply to rid oneself of these as expeditiously as possible.

Nowhere is the insidiousness of this message and the charm that cloaks it more apparent than in Cheever's handling of Farragut's relations with his brother. Farragut believes that Eben has tried to kill him twice—once by enticing him to swim in a shark-infested rip tide, and once by pushing him out a window—but the novel portrays these events ambiguously, and Farragut's suspicions may result from his own neuroses. In any case, he makes no effort to learn the truth. On the contrary, he refrains from even thinking about the incidents, and treats his brother as if nothing had happened. In spite of this, and in spite of the fact that he has no other reason for attacking his brother except for the anger that he feels and what Eben stands for, Farragut never evinces any guilt or regret for what he has done. Superficially, it is true, Farragut goes through a great deal before he makes his escape from prison, but the sum of his sufferings never amounts to a convincing process of psychological regeneration. Farragut's rebirth is too easy; he never goes through a long and painful confrontation with his own evil, but rather slips into a new self as slickly as an accomplished writer like Cheever turns a phrase.

Only the most callous or the most naive of readers will be able to participate in the mindless triumph sounded in the book's last sentences, as Cheever describes Farragut walking away from his successful escape: "He held his head high, his back straight, and walked along nicely. Rejoice, he thought, rejoice." How can we rejoice at the escape of a man who has killed his brother and never regretted it? How can we rejoice when one of our talented writers surrenders to "post-Freudian" cant? ■

The Establishment's Brown Study

"John Cheever strikes with an almost liturgical intensity in his extraordinary new novel . . . 'Falconer' is a kind of contemplation in shorthand, a meditation on the abstraction Cheever has always called 'home' but has never before located so explicitly in the life of the spirit. . ."
—Joan Didion, *The New York Times Book Review.*

"This is, in its very essence, a novel about the Christian experience of life, death, hope . . ."
—*Publishers Weekly.*

"(John Cheever's work has) validity, or what Tolstoi called, without apology, the artist's correct moral relation to his material . . . Cheever has a gift for catching the emotional nuances in the speech of people full of contradictions—like the killer guard who means no harm and loves his plants—like all of us . . . It is familiar theory that people outside prisons are as bad as the people inside, but Cheever makes the argument stick . . ."—*Saturday Review.*

"John Cheever has written a stunning meditation on all the forms of confinement and liberation that can be visited upon the human spirit . . . The theology here and throughout the novel is interesting and sophisticated. Sin is interpreted as a radical failure of love . . ." —*Commonweal.*

"And yet the experience of reading the book is one of elation. We are in the hands of a writer in full and secure possession of his powers, ready to tell us what he has learned during his lifetime about men and women, and men and men, and willing to grant us the freedom of our own imaginations . . . *Falconer* is a novel of Judgment that ends in miracle. The tenderness of Cheever's final episode is unmatched by anything he has written before . . ." —*Newsweek.*

"Certainly Ezekiel Farragut *is* a Cheever character . . . a disappointed romantic . . ."
—John Leonard, *Harper's Magazine.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Three Maidens Soiled by an Epoch

Sara Davidson: *Loose Change: Three Women of the Sixties;*
Doubleday and Company; New York, 1977.

by Mary Ellen Fox

> Three little maids from school are we
> Pert as a school-girl well can be
> Filled to the brim with girlish glee
>
> —W.S. Gilbert and A. Sullivan: *The Mikado*

This is the story of a decade. It is also the story of a group of people who believed that (in the words of the author): "We were certain we belonged to a generation that was special. We did not need or care about history because we had sprung from nowhere." This combination of ignorance and arrogance characterized the "sixties generation," as they are called, and although they believed that they had turned the world upside down forever, ten years later they have either accomodated to the once loathed Establishment or they are dead.

"Loose change" is the author's choice of phrase to describe the chaotic fragments of lives irrevocably affected by the tumultuous decade. The book is a narrative of three girl friends growing up in the sixties, participating in all that the decade has come to symbolize in our minds, and are thus representatives, in microcosm, of their generation.

Tasha, Susie and Sara, products of upper middle class homes and concerned families, entered Berkeley in the early sixties as archetypical sorority girls in cashmere sweaters and elaborate hairdos. Many of us began college life in a not too dissimilar manner. How, then, did some veer off so radically in one direction while others, the same age, with similar background and experiences, were hardly affected by the din of the epoch? Since this is a story of my contemporaries, my generation, I view the whole question as one of particular relevancy. The majority of my acquaintances were not revolutionaries and did not burn down their ROTC building or participate in sit-ins at the office of their college president. Most of us were defined by traditional student life and were too busy juggling heavy course loads with our other major concern: the opposite sex. Yet *this* latter group, which was in the majority, did not symbolize the era. Nobody paid it much attention; it was never invited to appear on TV talk shows; it did not make the cover of *Time;* and as for its opinion of the state of society, there were no hovering journalists eager for its analyses. Society's spotlight was beamed on the noisy minority which grew ever more dramatic and deserving of being the cynosure.

Because of Sara Davidson's conscientious attempt at honesty, one can obtain a clearer idea of what went on then. It is to her credit that the author, who was totally immersed in the counter-culture of the decade, nevertheless often gives a detrimental picture of the behavior of the participants. One would have to differ, however, with her analysis of their principal motivation: that these young people were activated by idealism, and wanted nothing except people to love one another, to end war forever, find justice for persecuted minorities and in general make the world a brighter place. Deliberately or inadvertently, the picture Davidson actually conveys is far less flattering: their activism derives, at best, from a dangerous ignorance of past history, but also seems to reflect a lethal combination of calculated nihilism, demand for attention, sheer boredom. For the first two decades of their lives these young people had simply had it too good. This, too, would change as the decade came to an end. Since there was no Black Fairy at their cradle to pronounce the incantation, "My child, what you need is a little misfortune," they decided to bestow it on themselves.

Susie, Tasha, Sara and their contemporaries believed that they were belligerents in a second American Revolution. The book, however, depicts a rebellion, and a pre-packaged one at that: like those paint-by-numbers kits popular in the 1950's which endowed the participants with a sense of their own creativity but never fooled an observer into considering the results art. The phases they undergo in their radicalization are as

Dr. Fox, a scholar of XIX century Spanish literature, thinks highly of its strong feminine characters who were always ready to pay for their irresponsibilities.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

predictable as a medical text's guide to childhood diseases: sororities; boys; the Pill; promiscuity; blacks; drugs; psychiatric analysis; feminism; ecology; eastern mysticism; professional ambitions. Even their infatuation with their own youth and creation of a Youth Culture seems ominously familiar: "Youth, youth, springtime of beauty" was the reverent anthem of Mussolini's Italy. And again their frightening ignorance and lack of perspective is underlined by Susie's statement: "I thought I'd never grow old." "Time is on my side" pounded the Rolling Stones as masses of young revolutionaries welded themselves together in a fascistic display of strength. At one Stones' concert the crowd became so unruly that Susie shivered in fear: "The masses she loved were capable of killing her." Together, committed, physically similar—good guys and bad were instantly discernible by hairstyle and garb—they would never feel the same excitement and yes, fun, again. In New York, Sara reads of the turmoil at Berkeley with yearning and regret: it was an enormous party and she was missing out.

From sororities to sit-ins, their sense of social conformity shaped the decade. "The demonstration would be the biggest social event of the semester," thought Sara, as she joined in with her placard which read: 'Jim Crow Must Go,' while wondering what it meant. No matter. One joined in, did one's thing regardless of truth, logic or objective reality. Susie's husband, Jeff, on trial for opposing the war, learned of his acquittal with dejection because it meant that the system worked; here he was, a professional revolutionary by choice and vocation, and the very equity of the system he was battling threatened to put him out of business. But before that, "on December 1 (1967) Jeff stood on the steps of Sproul Hall and set fire to what he said was his draft card but was actually a movie pass." This ultimate in symbolic irony, however, Ms. Davidson, reports without a wink though it may constitute the most acute explanation of the Movement.

At the end of the book Susie, the most radical of the three, confesses: "We were like children throwing tantrums. The times were exciting but boy were they scary . . . When I see them all with their nuclear families, it looks good to me. Why don't I have one?" And from the vantage point of time, another friend looks back and muses at their unmitigated nerve in trying to change the world when their own lives were in such a mess.

Chronologically, ten years have passed since the beginning of the ferment, but it's been a very long decade and Tasha, Sara and Susie are tired. They are in their early thirties and have already done enough for several lifetimes. Characters and reader share the feeling of too much, too soon. Although *Loose Change* ends on a note of happily-ever-after—each girl pursuing career and emotional attachment, each ironically searching for stability, monogamy, even financial security—many questions remain unresolved. Instead of the traditional route of A to B to C, they chose to follow their own path of A to Z to B, and one wonders if all the circumnavigation was worthwhile and necessary. It was no doubt an education—sentimental and otherwise—but the price

Continued on page 22

The Establishment's Chagrin

"O the '60's—the decade eludes us, it shimmers like silver between the colorless '50s and the practical '70s, and even as this decade clumps to its end we are still looking. Where did it go?"—*The New Republic* on *Loose Change.*

"The social revolution of the Sixties was a crashing sequence of events whose mysteries we may never be able to divine."—*Saturday Review* on *Loose Change.*

"Lost as some of these now over-30 'kids' may still seem, they did in fact change the world . . ."
—*Publishers Weekly.*

"What does America *do* to gobble up incipient revolutions . . . Why do our most passionate revolutionaries (whether leftist, black or feminist) eventually give up the hope of changing America's ways and turn instead to yogic meditation, Buddhism, 'born again' Christianity of Sufism? Why is America the country of the most extravagant hopes and the most profound disappointments? Does the media really have the power to trivialize and thus destroy every important social movement, or does it only seem that way to us? Are changes really occurring at a deeper level?"—*The New York Times Book Review* on *Loose Change.*

"The book centers on the difficulty her heroines experience trying to find durable companionship . . ."—*Atlantic Monthly.*

"And yet *Loose Change* ends on a note of optimism, of survival. These women have somehow endured . . ."—*Newsweek.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Cautionary Tale for Adults

Walker Percy: *Lancelot;*

Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York, 1977

by John Glass, Jr.

At one point in *Lancelot,* Walker Percy's latest novel, the protagonist and narrator, Lancelot Andrewes Lamar, visits the set of a movie being made in the small Southern town in which he lives. Lance's wife, Margot, has a part in the movie, and some scenes are being filmed at Belle Isle, the Lamar family mansion. On this occasion, however, the crew is set up in town for a scene in which the movie's hero, a "Christ-like hippie" who has come to revive all the dead folk in the community, liberates the librarian by having sexual intercourse with her against a background of novels by Dickens, Thackeray, and Scott. Worried that Lance may not fully appreciate the subtleties of the scene, the director hastens to explain that the novels represent "the drying up of Western juices." He is terribly excited by the symbolism of it all: "What we are trying to get across," he informs Lance, "is that it is not just screwing, though there is nothing wrong with that either, but a kind of sacrament and celebration of life." The hippie, he adds, "could be a high priest of Mithras." The absurdity of all this—and much more like it—Percy handles extremely well. Indeed, *Lancelot* provides additional proof, if any were needed, that Walker Percy is a very talented comic writer.

Like all serious comedy, however, Percy's has a grim side. The director's enthusiastic explanations of symbolism—punctuated by reminders to the actor-hippie that it is vitally important to hear his fly being unzipped—serve as a kind of prologue to the most important part of the episode. After one take, as the hippie zips his fly and begins to complain to another actor about bad advice from his broker, Lance catches sight of the real librarian, a woman he has known all his life. Heretofore an apparently sensible woman, she seems suddenly possessed. Almost in tears, she is begging that the company use her house for a scene, and hearing that her plea will be considered, she weeps openly and wrings her hands, overcome by gratitude. "I just can't tell you what it means to me," she sobs. Lance thinks she has gone mad, but she is not the only one. A moment later another perfectly respectable matron appears, offering to do "anything, *anything,* for the company, even carry klieg lights." That ordinary sane people should behave this way is, of course, funny; but to understand the special grimness of the scene, one must realize that women like these—sober and respectable spinsters, wives, and widows—were for long years the conservators of traditional values and mores in small Southern towns. That they, of all people, should be afflicted with this madness points up emphatically the disruption of our age. This point is well made, and Percy himself seems deeply disturbed by the madness he has diagnosed.

That madness and its effects are a major concern in *Lancelot,* but the concern is not a new one for Percy. In three earlier novels he has examined the predicament of modern man and presented protagonists who are alienated from the world in which they live. The case of Lance Lamar, however, seems to be the most desperate so far. Lance tells his story while confined to a cell in the New Orleans Center for Aberrant Behavior, or as he himself more simply puts it, "a nuthouse;" and much of his time is spent denouncing the moral confusion of modern society. In the end he utterly rejects a corrupt world and determines to establish a new order. One is not unsympathetic to his desire, but there seems little likelihood of success in such a venture.

Lance's aberrant behavior, the behavior for which he is confined to the Center, includes a little electronic voyeurism, a murder, and a rather spectacular bit of arson, all part of what he calls a quest for the unholy grail, genuine evil. The quest begins with Lance's accidental discovery of his wife's infidelity, a discovery which sobers him—literally—and forces him to look at himself and his world for the first time in years. But such a quest is especially difficult when the prevailing belief is that "everything and everyone's either wonderful or sick and nothing is evil," and Lance in fact concludes that his search has failed, that there "is no unholy grail just as there was no Holy Grail." He is mistaken. He does find what he seeks, but he does not recognize the "nothing," the cold emptiness, he discovers at the heart of evil.

One suspects that there will be many readers who will not like what *Lancelot* has to say. Lance Lamar's denunciations of the permissiveness of modern society are harsh and sweeping, but they are very often just. But many, even of those readers who agree with Lance's judgment, may be uneasy about the end of the novel. For *Lancelot* is finally a thoroughly Catholic novel, and at the end Percy offers only two possibilities: either the violent rejection of the world, which Lance proposes, or acceptance of a Christian sacramental view.

Mr. Glass, a Southerner and an English scholar, by nature takes a reserved view of Catholicism's quandaries in Louisiana.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lance has a silent listener to his narrative, a long-time friend called Percival, who is now both a Roman Catholic priest and a psychiatrist. Although Percival does not speak in the novel except to answer a series of questions at the end, his presence is crucial. It is Percival's presence which sparks Lance's recollection of the events which follow the discovery of Margot's infidelity, and as Lance's story progresses, the reader watches its effect on Percival. Apparently seriously troubled himself at the beginning, Percival appears gradually to recover his faith. He once again takes to wearing what Lance calls his "priest clothes" and finds himself able to offer prayers for the dead, a thing he had earlier refused to do. At the end, as Lance, about to be released, is preparing to set off for Virginia to establish his new order of things, Percival too prepares for a departure—to a small parish in Alabama, to make bread into the Body of Christ, to give communion to suburban housewives, and "to forgive the sins of Buick dealers." Both characters—and apparently Percy as well—agree that no other responses to what Lance calls Sodom are possible.

Technically, *Lancelot* is not a flawless novel. The device of the silent listener which Percy borrowed from Camus creates a bit of awkwardness, especially at the start. Moreover, despite the glimpses of him the reader receives, Percival remains almost too shadowy a character to bear the weight the novel places on him. In spite of flaws, however, *Lancelot* is a thoroughly readable novel. All the good stuff of a Gothic thriller—an old house with creaking timbers, a raging storm, apparitions, murder, madness—is here, much of it borrowed, one suspects, from the late E.A. Poe. Here, too, are most of those trappings which seem especially to delight Northern readers of novels by Southern writers—the network of aunts and cousins, and quaint and curious names, the hints of a dark and bloody past. Yet the novel is more than either Gothic romance or a piece of local color. Finally it is a cautionary tale, not unlike Dante's *Comedy* if we may take the epigraph seriously, designed to show us the lost souls so that we may purpose amendment in ourselves. ■

Establishment's Polite Dissatisfaction

"It is not a cheery book, and those of us who would make Percy out to be a safe Christian novelist had better beware . . ."—*The Christian Century*

"Art . . . should be a little less pompous, a lot more serious. It should stop sniveling and go for answers or else shut up . . ."—*The New York Times Book Review.*

"Lancelot's fantasy of setting out for Virginia ('where it all started'), and there inaugurating a Third Revolution founded upon honor, chivalry, and the suppression of pornography could be enjoyed as comic megalomania if we did not suspect a certain authorial complicity in the protagonist's program . . ."—*The New York Review of Books.*

". . . one finds it hard to take seriously the novel's message of total destruction . . ."—*The New Leader.*

"He rails on, a voice in a wilderness of porno shops and massage parlors, playing Jeremiah to Hugh Hefner, Larry Flynt, and company. It is the voice of one who sees himself as the last man in America who believes in love . . ."—*Saturday Review.*

"Percy seems to have backed himself into an empty corner with his obsessed and isolated seeker . . ."
—*The New Yorker.*

". . . when (Percy) ruminates philosophically on sex and sin and violence and evil and the craziness of the age, it is hard to take him seriously, even when his comments are seemingly rational and plausible . . ."—*The Progressive.*

"Absurd mutterings . . ."—*Rolling Stone.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Thriving Virulence And Well-Heeled Deviation

Gore Vidal: *Matters of Fact and of Fiction: Essays 1973-1976;*
Random House; New York, 1977.

by Otto J. Scott

There is something nearly inexpressibly dreary about this collection of articles recycled from *The New York Review of Books* and *New Statesman.* They reveal a great deal about the author; too much, in fact, for decency. A sense of embarrassment rises, similar to the sensation of watching an actor in an X-rated movie who smiles into the camera throughout his gyrations.

Yet the book is valuable, in a macabre sort of way, for its glimpses into a set of people and their attitudes usually as closed and mysterious to the everyday world of normal persons as the painted catamites of Hollywood & Vine, or the hideous cellars of Greenwich Village. In discussing the *Memoirs* of Tennessee Williams, for instance, this passage occurs:

> *"I don't remember whether or not I ever told Tennessee that I had actually seen but not met him the previous year. He was following me up Fifth Avenue while I, in turn, was stalking yet another quarry, I recognized him: he wore a blue bow with polka dots. In no mood for literary encounters, I gave him a scowl and he abandoned the chase just north of Rockefeller Center. I don't recall how my own pursuit ended . . ."*

Mr. Scott is attracted to both fairness and historical research which enables him to see his contemporaries in proper dimensions.

That glimpse of street-walking is sandwiched, however, between rhapsodic descriptions of the reviewer, Vidal, and his recollections of various parties and encounters in Rome shortly after World War II, which is described as a "golden dream." A little later Vidal smiles again at the reader, and says, "Incidentally, I am mesmerized by the tributes to my beauty that keep cropping up in the memoirs of the period." Those, we are free to infer, are tributes from persons who most often express their lofty sense of aesthetics in the art of graffiti.

His comments about other writers are less admiring, with the exception of Mary Renault. Her recreations of a bisexual Pagan world lead to some predictable sighs over a vanished Eden, and bitter asides on an evil Christianity. For the rest, writers are apt to get short shrift and no mercy from Vidal (one hesitates to call him Mister). Solzhenitsyn was by "nature destined to write manuals of artillery," Herman Wouk is too Jewish to write about upper class "goyishers," the teachers who toil over novels are "hacks" who produce books to be taught and not read—and only the Italian author Italo Calvino is worthy of a full-article panegyric.

In time, these reminiscences of Vidal squeezed between comments on other writers, times and events, add up to a series of strip-teases of a remarkable sort; of a person who has forgotten—or who has closed his eyes—to the fact that the eyes of the world are unwinking and penetrating. There is also a gathering sense that Vidal has reached the stage that overcomes certain types of actors, or other public figures, who begin to become exaggerations of themselves. The role overtakes, and the writer—in this instance—merges into performer.

That becomes horridly evident in the last section, which contains the articles on "fact." These range from the times of President and Mrs. U.S. Grant to Howard Hunt, ITT and Robert Moses. President Grant has not been well treated by American historians, who—at least in this century—seem to find it hard to forgive this nation for its history. But to call U.S. Grant, a man who would have been a Caesar in Rome, and his wife—"these two odd little creatures"—is to fall into a back-of-the-stairs assessment once too often. Vidal also describes Charles Sumner, a true grotesque, as "brilliant." Such judgments, displayed as a part of a tedious article on the Grants, inspired by the General's intelligent *Memoirs* and the somewhat silly effort of his widow, do not exhibit any historical insight into an era still very near our own. For President Grant crushed Sumner as contemptuously as a man squashes a bug, and will remain a great historical figure long after Vidal ceases to be a footnote of our times.

But Vidal's treatment of General Grant, like his assessment of ITT is so much a part of the Radical Camp school

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that it does not surprise, nor inform, nor entertain. Attitudes that are fashionable at the expense of intelligence simply bore.

What is truly surprising is an article that appeared at the end of last year, in *The New York Review of Books,* titled "The Art and Arts of E. Howard Hunt." Unlike Vidal, I never heard of Mr. Hunt until the Watergate scandal surfaced, but in this article he interrupts the narrative, for the thousandth time for a personal note. He tells us that Mr. Hunt obtained a Guggenheim Foundation grant in a year when both Truman Capote and Vidal himself received rejections. He then traces Mr. Hunt's career as a writer, CIA official, etcetera with hatred, and concludes with some truly scabrous implications that imply the CIA, or former President Nixon, might have had some connection with the shooting of Mr. George Wallace. At the time this appeared in print, Mr. Hunt was in prison, his wife was dead, his reputation shattered and his career destroyed, his possessions stripped by lawyers. He was, in other words, fair game for those who attack the fallen.

The same hating and lynch-like spirit suffuses Vidal's comments about Mr. Nixon. One is reminded of the passages that describe social demoralization in Charles Diehl's classic *Byzantium: Greatness and Decline,* and in particular two passages. The first, on pages 144-145, describes how the mob mutilated and murdered the fallen Emperor Andronicus Comnenus, and the second, on pages 147-148, describes a successful courtier, of the same eleventh century period. "He was," says Diehl of Michael Psellus, "learned, talented and versatile . . . a writer of the first order, full of humour and verve . . . but he intrigued with the worst. It was said of him that he was a professional journalist, who knew that his pen was a weapon . . . It is certain that he preferred charges against his old friends when so ordered . . . that he yielded without protest to the revolution . . . He was mean, cowardly and corrupt; a perfect example of the Byzantine courtier, in whom a contemptible nature was combined with a first-class brain."

In reading Vidal's articles, one is impelled to wonder if, in our present times of social demoralization, we are not producing—and elevating to undeserved eminences—the same sort of unscrupulous talents, whose efforts may dazzle some and nauseate many more. ■

The Establishment's Taste

"Gore Vidal as an essayist accomplishes what so many Victorian novelists set out to do—to entertain and to edify. He is always funny and often witty. His paradoxes at their best rival Oscar Wilde's best . . ."—*Harper's Magazine.*

". . . whatever his subject . . . it is nearly always he who is the subject you find the most interesting . . ."—Stephen Spender, *The New York Times Book Review.*

"He is a moralist whose subject is hypocrisy and the clichés which provide the public with short cuts to self-congratulation . . ."—*The New York Review of Books.*

"His self-possession, intelligence and wolfish wit are everywhere visible . . ."—*Newsweek.*

"Not since Thomas de Quincey's chronicles of halcyon days with Wordsworth and Coleridge has there been such a hilarious wedding of criticism and remembrance . . ."—*Village Voice.*

". . . a fascinating exercise . . ."—*Publishers Weekly.*

"Recommended."—*Library Journal.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Sad and Maladroit Fiesta

Morris Dickstein: *The Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties;*

Basic Books; New York, 1977.

by Christopher Manion

When I told a friend who raised her children during the sixties that this book was a cultural history of that period, she replied: "It must be pretty short." And she would have been right, had the author written just that. Instead, Morris Dickstein, who was there, wants to tell us "what it felt like" to grow up in the sixties, which he entered as an undergraduate at Columbia, fresh from an orthodox Jewish background, to become a graduate student at Yale and a teacher at Columbia as the period wound down. It would appear that he never got over a hundred miles away from New York, and it shows.

The Education of Morris Dickstein might be the title of the real book which is neither cultural history nor mere criticism; rather than combine the two approaches, an admittedly challenging task, the author presents us with considerations of literature surrounded by—and orbiting around—politics. Much of the critical material seems to be previously published work from *The New York Times Book Review* and *Partisan Review.* But at the center and around the edges, it is possessed of one simple message: the fifties, which nurtured everything bad — repression, McCarthyism, the Rosenbergs, grey flannel suits and the Cold War—were followed by everything Dickstein had learned to love: liberation in literature, in sexual norms, in politics and the imagination. Allen Ginsberg, one of Dickstein's favorites, called it "magic politics"—"poetry and theatre sublime enough to change the national will and open up consciousness in the populace." Dickstein points out that this may be found wanting in practical possibilities, but "preserves its appeal as a vision."

Magic, of course, implies the forcing of a spirit—good or evil—to break the natural order of events when it is cornered by the right formula. The notion is not new to history. Hegel, for whom Dickstein expresses a certain affinity, dabbles in magic when "solving" the "riddle of history." And Friedrich Schiller, in his inaugural lecture as a historian at the University of Jena just prior to the French Revolution, calls on his listeners to create "artificial links" to connect otherwise meaningless events of the past, links forged by the writer's imagination and inspired by the demands of present-day events. Then, he goes on, we can make the reader believe what we want him to believe (and what he would otherwise reject) by means of an "optical illusion" which will make him feel better. Dickstein's modern sages call it relevance.

This does not imply that Dickstein and Ginsberg, would actively attempt to deceive, only that visions such as theirs, however acquired, often collide with reality so forcefully that they can be preserved only by "magic"—willful alteration of perceived reality by the invocation of slogans, ideological diatribes, or repression of conflicting evidence; such visions are then accepted as "second realities" which replace the real thing so effectively that further repression becomes either unconscious or unnecessary. The painstaking process of investigation is dominated by, or replaced by, an unabashed embracing of the vision. It is the light of his own vision, then, that Dickstein wants to shed on developments which have left "some people feeling puzzled or confused."

Dickstein's illumination amounts to a two-toned appeal to the good old "black-and-white" which even his favorite writers would eschew as "too simplistic for the complex problems of today." He envisions the fifties much as a contemporary civilized being might imagine the Neanderthal period. For all its critical trappings, this is a fundamentally political book, and Dickstein hails the political turn which all religion and literature took in the sixties. The evil fifties mentality gives way to the bountiful sixties mentality which overcomes the repression like D.H. Lawrence's "new shoots of life springing up and slowly bursting the foundations." And one must realize that the sixties is just a state of mind, that this process can happen any time, anywhere. If you went to Columbia in the late fifties, you were already there. If you agree with Dickstein's political views, you're *still* there. It's kind of a private *Magical Mystery Tour.* Once you are able to wake up and assess the reality with fairness of mind and heart, you may find a lot of rubbish and dirt. But that's another story.

But there is good news: For those who want an insight into the handful of rock musicians and the few dozen writers

Christopher Manion, a graduate of Notre Dame and an officer of the Rockford College Institute, is a guitarist who witnessed firsthand the rise and fall of the Woodstock generation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which Dickstein considers as the whole of the culture he is commentating ("rock *was* the culture of the sixties in a unique and special way"), his treatment reflects a labor of love and many well-worn volumes (and records) on his shelves. He is at home here, and chides those close to him—and not so close: Mailer "groped" through three novels to find himself, Malamud is "flawed," Sontag is "marred." He selects a narrow corner of the writing of the period and does a good job with it (but beware if you oppose his thesis: Tom Wolfe, another Yale Ph.D., is simplistic and misreads the sixties—so there!)

Dickstein's chosen subjects in the musical arena—Bob Dylan, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones—are treated knowledgeably, somewhat roughly, but nonetheless sympathetically. The sexual character of rock is a foregone conclusion, and Dickstein himself discovered that he had entered the sixties so sexually repressed that he didn't even realize it. Country music, however, and blues—not the reprocessed city varieties but the real thing that found its way from authentic ethnic sources to merge with pop music in the sixties until it was impossible to tell which was folk-rock or country blues or vice-versa—this musical melting pot receives no attention. Why? Because its antecedents are consistent far into the fifties, forties, even beyond, and collide with Dickstein's vision. But these forms never penetrated New York until they were suitably commercialized (and the TV show "Hee-Haw" shows what New York really thinks of the rest of the country). These songs were everywhere else, though, treating real-life problems with persuasive, uncluttered directness, while Paul Goodman, a favorite poet of the protest crowd, was not interested in graduate-student Dickstein's "clever and brilliant" observations at a conference somewhere because Dickstein didn't "turn him on." Goodman, you see, had a "passion for the young which was fueled by his sexual need," "driven and debased by sexual hungers and humiliations." *Those* were the sixties.

What we have here, then, is one very private, very personal, and very belabored sixties' life, bearing and reflecting the imprint of the New York intellectual community during those years which allegedly constitute the "watershed of our recent cultural history." In the song from which the book's title it taken, Bob Dylan does not tell us whether the Gates of Eden are approaching or receding: for Dickstein, they are always there but just out of reach. This is a period piece, and as a cultural history it is short indeed. It can best be summed up in the words of the Paul Simon song from the end of the era: "A man hears what he wants to hear, and disregards the rest." ■

The Establishment's Preference

"There was something about the sweet reason of Dickstein's tone that I found attractive . . . The theoretical limitations of the book were offset . . . by its propaganda potential . . ."—*Village Voice.*

"Here is a stimulating overview of the painful birth of a new sensibility among a new generation which, he feels, will yet 'have its say' in a new way . . ."—*Publishers Weekly.*

"I still find excessive Dickstein's estimate of the period's cultural achievements, but I can see that his book makes the unqualified opposition of such critics as Philip Rahv, Saul Bellow and Daniel Bell seem flat and uninformative by comparison. Those writers, notwithstanding the validity of many of their judgments, simply refused to take the period seriously. Dickstein has shown, conclusively, the inadequacy of this position. He makes it clear that we learn more about the period by taking it seriously than by writing it off as the triumph of the 'trendy' . . ."—Christopher Lasch, *The New York Times Book Review.*

"What *Gates of Eden is willing* to essay it essays with humanity and intelligence . . ."—*New Times.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—COMMENDABLES—

An Arsenal Stockpiled with Arguments

Paul Johnson: ***Enemies of Society;*** Atheneum; New York, 1977.

By Robert Nisbet

Society, for Paul Johnson, is capitalist, middle class society, the only possible society, he emphasizes, that can, in our era, make possible political freedom and a genuinely civilized culture. This society came into being roughly in the sixteenth century, and, with only occasional setbacks, prospered, developed, and spread until the twentieth century. Despite the fact that capitalism has, on the record, given freedom and security to more people than any economic system in all history, and despite the fact that in our century wherever capitalism has broken down or been destroyed, despotism and poverty have followed, this economic system has nevertheless been under attack for well over a century.

Johnson's chosen "Enemies of Society" do him and our middle class society honor. They include ecological fanatics and doom-sayers, philosophers whose logic-chopping has virtually destroyed a once great tradition, social scientists whose left-wing ideologies are masked in pseudo-science, professors who have abandoned true scholarship in favor of class room political militancy, teachers in the schools who have substituted pap for curriculum, indulgence for discipline, and artists and writers whose hatred of capitalism has taken the forms of adulation of everything evil from schizophrenia to permanent terror. All in all, this is a powerful and necessary book even though I find occasional lapses of critical judgment or interpretation and signs of haste (such as misspellings of proper names) in the book's preparation. ■

Dr. Nisbet is Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities at Columbia.

* * *

"Mr. Johnson is immensely entertaining, but the reader may not share his sense of urgency—his feeling that Western culture may be doomed by these trends"—*The New Yorker.*

Berger's Good Sense

Peter L. Berger: ***Facing Up to Modernity;*** Basic Books; New York, 1977.

Peter Berger takes on the widespread myths of the technological age. He argues that by tearing down our old belief structures and replacing them with overdoses of "freedom" and "liberation," we breed bogus relationships, loneliness and self-doubt. He goes on to give horrifying examples of what happens when the current value-neutral attitude is taken to its logical conclusion. He analyzes modern culture's aberrant search for a new basis of values. He concludes that the authority of traditional religion still remains the supreme source of insights and explanations. He'll be hated by liberal pundits and thanked by anyone who has still preserved a modicum of good sense. ■

Trilling's Appeal

Diana Trilling: ***We Must March My Darlings: A Critical Decade;*** Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich; New York, 1977.

A collection of lucid, thoughtful essays written in beautiful English prose, a delight difficult to find amidst the contemporary racket and shrillness of the reviewers—pushy journalists feigning to be critics. Mrs. Trilling's concern *is* criticism. She expresses a worry:

> *"We are accustomed, of course, to the reluctance of our critics to submit to rigorous examination any political or social idea which is presented to them under the aspect of enlightened dissidence."*

This is not an easy book to read for those unaccustomed to the form of the literary essay. However, in its finely chiseled phrases and elaborate reasoning there is a multitude of clean-cut, accessible-to-anyone explanations and conclusions. Anyone who has given a thought to what has happened to the ideas which once successfully governed our daily lives, will find in this book his own thoughts, feelings, anxieties and presentiments formulated in a way that makes them clearly understandable in spite of the refined language. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—COMMENDABLES—

Burditt's Happy Ending

Joyce Burditt: ***The Cracker Factory;***
Macmillan; New York, 1977.

A housewife's autobiographical novel about a human being's recovery from alcoholism and mental trouble. Burditt committed two grave mistakes: her story glorifies a good husband and ends on a happy note. A liberal book-club turned down her book as "politically regressive." As Burditt said in an interview: "They objected to the main character going back to her husband in the end . . . Well, my husband supported me financially and every other way for a year and a half while I worked on it. He maintained his own writing career as well as cleaning, cooking, and taking care of three cats, a dog, and three teen-agers." ■

White's Serene Talents

E.B. White: ***Essays of E.B. White;***
Harper & Row; New York, 1977.

The sizeable checks from magazines go nowadays to people who know how to use terms like "role models" or "role-playing" in their writing. Applying this nomenclature to an assessment of E.B. White, man and work, one might say: He is an American cultural model whose role is venerable simplicity. He certainly is too, in our opinion, one of the few "men of letters" in our contemporary literary tradition. This distinguishes him from writers and novelists. Eudora Welty, a woman of letters, wrote recently about White in *The New York Times Book Review:* "The writing is itself dateless as a cloudless sky, because the author has dateless virtues . . ." And: "In this collection, Mr. White has made such scenes as the summers of 'the American family at play' fadeless for us." Such a literary feat seems incredible in our epoch of frustration and abomination perceived by writers as the gist of life. However, it seems to have been wrought in the pages of this book. ■

Caputo's Probity

Philip Caputo: ***A Rumor of War;***
Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1977.

This is perhaps the first honest journalistic attempt to tell us more about Vietnam than the modish stereotypes. It exceeds journalism and attains the art of a thoughtful, literary documentation. The author obviously cares for integrity—his work's and his own. The war can now be seen not through political slogans, but through the human mind and human sensitivities. Caputo knows the taste of man's humiliation in the face of the unacceptable, and he values man's faculty for reasoning without relying on modish clichés. For this he has been uniformly acclaimed in all quarters of American cultural opinion. ■

Eidelberg's Keen Insight

Paul Eidelberg: ***Beyond Détente;***
Sherwood Sugden & Company;
LaSalle, Illinois, 1977.

How to be right and honorable in foreign policy without being sentimental or jingoistic? This is the perennial quandary of statesmen and leaders. Dr. Eidelberg, Salvatori Research Professor at Claremont College, is a scientist's scientist gifted in the selection of apt quotations, and impressive in the multitude of statistics data adduced in support of his conclusions. He extrapolates from the writings of Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Washington and Lincoln a projection of how they might behave if faced with Castros, Brezhnevs, the problems of the Export-Import Bank and our hamletic dilemma with computers sought by communists: to sell or not to sell? If you suppress your inclinations to comment on foreign policy, in fear of being accused of "imperialistic" and "reactionary" instincts—you would find in Professor Eidelberg a fountain of irrefutable arguments to fend off such incriminations. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IN FOCUS

Le Carré's Routine

John le Carré: *The Honourable Schoolboy;* Knopf; New York, 1977.

In Soviet Russia, there is an institutionalized obsession with spying, the spy novel sustains the official communist demonology. A shabby, politico-ideological fiction of the lowest intellectual quality is constantly produced where the CIA agent is responsible for crop disasters, and for promiscuity in the high schools. Until a couple of decades ago, the Western spy novel was a matter of entertainment, only occasionally used for a serious moral discourse (Joseph Conrad) or an exercise in elegant storytelling (Somerset Maugham) or an intellectual endeavor (Graham Greene). Of late, however, the showbiz character of the Ian Fleming *genre* has merged with the liberal proclivity for slandering America: the undercover-activity novel always galvanized enough suspense to entertain, but in our days it also serves to prove that secret agents are out to oppress Americans. Modish radical novelists in England and the U.S. tailor their paltry fantasy tales to fit a book market suffused with journalistic platitudes on the subject: their pathetic clichés oddly parallel the Soviet vision of a Western agent, a *de facto* Satan incarnate.

The difference between the entertainment hacks and left-radical hacks on one side and le Carré on the other is simple but seminal: the latter brought into being a new stereotype. His British intelligence officers are disgusting, mangy little types motivated by petty needs. He invents situations in which skepticism, malaise, greed, cynicism, weariness and simple doltishness rationalize their existence as humans and spooks. This has been enough to endear le Carré to the jaded liberal Establishment in America which turned him into a best-selling writer. As both a writer and an expert, he seems highly overrated. His concepts are rooted in neither reason nor emotion but in poses. Patriotism or an ideological commitment of high degree, the time-honored motifs for clandestine involvement, do not exist for him. He and his men stand for nothing which can be evaluated in more complex terms than unspecified solidarity, or crude fatalism and inertia. He has a talent for evoking the utter unattractiveness of the allegedly attractive and overromanticized spy folklore, but this can hardly be deemed a literary merit. His last book is no exception. ■

Roth's Astute Narcissism

Philip Roth: *The Professor of Desire;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York, 1977.

This is an excellent piece of refined, humorous writing that serves nothing. Its usefulness for mankind is miniscule. Liberal humanism perceives pure knowing about man and woman as good in itself; thus Mr. Roth, an exquisite writer, once again puts into operation his prodigious skill to gaze at his own belly button. We are far from sympathetic toward didactic "socialist realism" and we much appreciate the examination of self, but once in a while something new about the navel must be introduced to retain the validity of introspection. Buying and reading last Roth one learns nothing about *one's* own navel, or one's wife's navel, or one's neighbor's navel (something Proust knew how to do when he wrote about navels). After all our efforts to fathom Roth's message, we wind up knowing only about Mr. Roth's navel. ■

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

Vladimir Nabokov

What the Liberal Establishment wanted

us *NOT* to know about his writing, his thought, himself.

And:

Opinions & Views — Commendables — In Focus — Waste of Money

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

— WASTE OF MONEY —

Coover's Contumely

Robert Coover: *The Public Burning;* Viking; New York, 1977.

What do you do with a novelist who, in 534 pages, exerts every possible effort to tell you that your country is a heap of dung, your life is a nightmare of which you yourself have too little recognition, and your faculty of reasoning is only your personal illusion? He then tries to convince you that history, of which your life is a part, is just a conglomeration of senseless noises, vile odors, and obscene gestures, and that drooling people rule the spurious reality you have to exist in regardless of your own volition. If you have preserved the last shred of good sense—which the novelist in question thinks impossible—you simply would not buy his novel. And this is precisely what we, at *Chronicles of Culture,* ask you to do, as it is the only way to convince authors and publishers that there are people in America whose gray matter still works. ■

Rossner's Jaded Freakishness

Judith Rossner: *Attachments;* Simon & Schuster; New York, 1977.

A novel about copulating with Siamese twins. D.H. Lawrence insisted on a rigorous distinction between mating and coupling, seeing in it a moral directive necessary for cultures to survive. In the case of Ms. Rossner's literary preoccupation with abnormality and freakishness, the differentiation is immaterial: a new verb has to be invented to denote what Nadine, Ms. Rossner's heroine, an obnoxiously spoiled California woman, does with two human creatures permanently joined at the abdomen. There is a metaphor somewhere to be looked for, but it runs aground in its own neurotic shallowness: it seems that author Rossner finds making love to Siamese twins a possible remedy for the American housewife's inherent loneliness. This exercise in odious sensationalism posing as tormenting analysis of life's traps and of human search for fulfillment, appears nothing but ludicrous to the unprejudiced eye. Not to the Establishment's reviewers, however, who have become enraptured with it: *The New York Times* called it "a lovely, bitter, frightening book"; *Library Journal* calls Nadine "almost a modern American Everywoman." The most valuable critical insight came from *Ms* magazine; a feminist sage inferred with the subtlety for which her organ is famous: "I would have liked more of the technical, mechanical information about how the twins functioned, especially sexually . . ." This quote, we think, proves that Ms. Rossner's pioneer toil found a pensive and earnest response. ■

Ringer's and Korda's Snake Oil Peddling

Robert J. Ringer: *Looking Out For No. 1;* Funk & Wagnall; New York, 1977.

Michael Korda: *Success!;* Random House; New York, 1977.

We think that it's beneath one's dignity to touch books like these. But millions touch, buy and even read them. In the newspapers, Mr. Ringer enjoys the sobriquet of "people's philosopher", while Random House, a firm which covets respectability, does not shy from advertising Mr. Korda as "the Machiavellian genius who brought you *Power."* It's here where the old adage that no one ever went broke on underestimating the idiocy of the American public comes in. Mr. Ringer preaches the deities of arrogance and bullying; Mr. Korda worships crude deceit, outright manipulations of others and churlishness as charm. They both assume that there are enough fools in America who would believe that these "qualities" in the long run bring a human being forth in life. They may be right, they two are the most valid proof of this eerie theory.

The self-help, or "making it", books were always regarded by the rest of the world as a boil on the healthy complexion of the American culture. However, the advisory fervor of Dale Carnegie, or Norman Vincent Peale, was firmly grounded in the rich soil of the Judeo-Christian hierarchism of virtues which they knew how to season with the endemic American additives of moral and behavioral values. The Ringers and Kordas of today are sending out quite a reverse message: egoism, ruthlessness, greed, cheap skepticism as "philosophy", amorality as psychic comfort, a smart-aleck as hero. They do not warn their sheepish disciples about the dangers of street-wise imbecility—the innermost source of existential comeuppance which every downfallen intimidator inevitably comes to know as his destiny. Competition, effort and enterprise, self-reliance, well-directed energy—that is, those elements of personal advancement which are controllable through ethics—are pitiable in their "teachings." They appeal to the worst predatory instincts: open aggression, assault on other beings in every

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WASTE OF MONEY

possible way, masked only when the society's harsh rules cannot be violated. After all, Mr. Ringer's first opus was entitled: *Winning Through Intimidation,* and by now, most if not all of those who bought it, and drank at the well of its "wisdom," know that they have won nothing and its directive was a lie. ■

Mitford's British-Upper-Class-Twit Ego

Jessica Mitford: ***A Fine Old Conflict;*** Knopf; New York, 1977.

This is a book dedicated to show how much of a boon to America card-carrying communists were during the '30's, '40's and '50's. Especially if they personally were dumb enough not to understand what they were doing, what they stood for, what were the consequences of their deeds, and how dimwitted was their firm conviction that their actions did *not* serve cynical operators in Moscow but some noble goals. There are few things more disgusting than the frenzy of an aristocratic, or a capitalistic, progeny in the services of revolution or social redress. The pro-communist libido of Mitford and her ilk drives them to a specious righteousness which always turns either into vituperation or stupidity. They wreak more harm and havoc on the world than all the workers and peasants ever did with their demands. Their memoirs, novels, and polemics vitiate minds which are susceptible to their cheap radical homilies, and induce weak characters to perennially reenact their feebleminded misdeeds. Nothing tells better what confusion and perversion they cause than these sentences from a review of Mitford's book by a pro-communist reviewer, a frequent contributor to the *Chicago Tribune Book World:*

> *"Mitford does not claim that she was duped or made a tool of sinister forces. Indeed, it is hard to search out a sinister force among her friends and associates. The mean and sinister are those who sought to persecute and prosecute communists in the belief that they were dangerous."*

These are words printed by a "responsible" American newspaper at a time when it has become indisputably clear how *dangerous* the communists were to those 20,000,000 murdered Russians, to the subjugated and oppressed Eastern Europeans, to any American attempt to protect rationality and good will in the post-World War II world. And how the fierce, myopic support of the Mitfords and their politico-ideological coterie have helped the communists to increase their power to the point of being a lethal threat to mankind's future. ■

Three Maidens

Continued from page 11

might simply be too high and the scars of the myriad experiences too deep to be reckoned without the perspective of time. Drugs, promiscuity, severe depression—all must exact their toll. Davidson is too precipitous in her judgment, since the end of her narrative is not the conclusion of the lives of Susie, Tasha and Sara. She eschews making clear how irrevocably eviscerated by slogans minds become, how miserably human dignity got flattened; she talks about "waste and decadence" but she does not view as waste her copulating with virtually every man who had expressed a wish.

The parallel fates of several contemporaries who paraded their well known personae among the faces in the sixties are instructive and ironic: Mario Savio, prime mover at Berkeley, is in an insane asylum; Eldridge Cleaver, black militant and professional rapist, has been "born again"; Abby Hoffman, who conceived of Youth as an International Party, writes a travel column; Rennie Davis, leader of the Chicago Seven, is working his way up the corporate ladder as a trainee for John Hancock. At the height of the summer of 1968, Ms. Davidson sat beside the Eden Roc Hotel pool in Miami Beach with Tom Winship, "the editor of New England's largest newspaper." She recalls wistfully: "There were student uprisings all over the world." Mr. Winship's son was reading the *Quotations of Chairman Mao.* "Winship said to me, with a brave, befogged look in his Yankee eyes, 'Well, I think we're going to have a revolution.' " If some were confused at the time, the perspective of a passing decade has certainly put the judgment of Mr. Winship, heir to the merciless rationality of Boston Brahmins, in the category of idiocy. But Sara Davidson never admits intellectual failure, error, feeblemindedness. She stubbornly sticks to the poignancy of disillusionment and the disintegration of valiant ideals as the leitmotif of her narrative. The book is thus deprived of being a moral tale, an appendix to the history of our time. In conclusion, she writes: "I could talk about the concrete, lasting effects of the decade: the end of the draft; the profound revolution in sexual relationships; the granting of the right to vote to eighteen-year-olds and the right to abortion to women." But what makes her so positive that these will be such a boon to humankind, civilization, and country after all the woes described?

Davidson has certainly come a long way from the commencement of *Loose Change* where she quotes (from an article by Jacob Brackman for *Esquire*): ". . . We would not default, succumb to the certainties of age . . . (nor) compromise maturely . . normality was now a disease." At the end of the book she writes, "But the truth is, I have not found answers and I'm not sure I remember the questions." This is no doubt a position of maturity, but it is ironic to hear it from a member of a generation who, unlike the rest of humanity, was so certain that it knew both questions and answers. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Rockford College Institute is founded on the premise that both America and Western civilization are in urgent need of the revival of certain ideas which have become decomposed, bemuddled and trampled by the culture of our time. It attempts to restore reason, order and tradition to their natural role in human affairs. It believes that a new meaningfulness can be found in permanent values by raising the level of cultural sophistication, which should not be confused with intellectual sophistry.

* * * * *

The Rockford College Institute publishes ***The Rockford Papers,*** which is designed to present understanding about the causes and the consequences of prevailing cultural biases, to clarify certain issues which relate to the survival of civilized living, and to assist in the development of a coherent philosophy of freedom.

In the past issues:

- On Pamphleteering
- Our Civilization
- Literature and Morality
- Television's Responsibility or Irresponsibility?
- On Culture
- The Recent Development in Morals, Art and Taste
- Sexual Conduct and Social Decomposition
- Capitalism, Taste And The Nature Of Man
- Capitalism and Culture
- Liberal Culture and The Sin of Incoherence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rockford College Institute
Rockford College
5050 East State Street
Rockford, Illinois 61101

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED